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Iran: Reporter freed

Seib put on flight to W. Germany

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7 NICOSIA, Cyprus — Officials at Tehran airport said American journalist Gerald Seib left for Frankfurt early yesterday aboard a Lufthansa Airlines flight.

Seib had been arrested by Iranian authorities and accused of spying while on a government-sponsored press tour.

The airport officials, reached by telephone from Nicosia, said Lufthansa flight 601, with Seib aboard, departed this morning. They said the plane would stop briefly at Bandar Abbas in southern Iran before continuing to West Germany.

Also yesterday, Canada's Foreign Office in Ottawa said it had been advised that Philip Engs, a Canadian engineer arrested Dec. 2 in Iran on espionage charges, would be "released soon."

An American telecommunications specialist and a British businessman also are imprisoned in Iran on similar charges.

Seib, 30, a Cairo-based reporter for the Wall Street Journal, was among 57 foreign journalists invited to visit the southern front in the war with Iraq when he was arrested Saturday.

The Information Ministry announced Wednesday that authorities had decided to expel Seib after "a judicial probe into his case ended," and that he was "permanently banned from returning to Iran."

The official Islamic Republic News Agency

gave no details of the investigation involving Seib, but he apparently was cleared.

Seib had been in Iran 10 days when he was detained and accused of spying for Israel. The Iranian news agency said a "spy of the Zionist regime" was arrested after entering the country with a false passport, disguised as a journalist.

In the other cases, the Canadian engineer, Engs, 29, was accused of possessing secret documents and taking pictures of top-secret installations in Iran.

Denys Tessier of the Canadian Foreign Office said the Danish ambassador in Tehran, who represents Canada's interests, "has been informed that Mr. Engs will be released soon, but we have no confirmation that he is now released."

He said the ambassador, Ib Andreassen, probably would put Engs on the first flight out of Tehran after his release.

Another American, Jon Pattis, 50, of Bethesda, Md., was arrested June 16, after Iraqi warplanes bombed the Assadabad telecommunications center 200 miles southwest of Tehran. The Iranians said that Pattis, working in Iran as a consultant, gave the CIA information on the center that was passed to Iraq.

John Cooper, 51, a British businessman and part-time financial journalist, was arrested a year ago. On Dec. 10, he was charged with espionage.

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